

THE ABDUCTION OF THE  
O'BANAGHER.

## CHAPTER I.

THE O'Banaghers were originally Kings of Ireland. Whether they reigned over the entire island, or whether their sway extended merely to a portion of the province of Munster, remains to this day an open question. In "Keating's General History of Ireland"—a charming work, which carries the reader back to periods anterior to the Flood—there is no mention of the family as having at any time enjoyed sovereign power. The testimony of oral tradition, however—upon which to a great extent the existence of the ancient gods rests—is very strong, if not explicit, in favour of the claims of The O'Banagher. And it is by no means surprising that persons whose ancestry dates beyond that of Jupiter himself should appeal to the same class of evidence as that upon which are based the pretensions of the once popular heathen divinity.

When—owing first of all to deplorable family disputes of an exciting character, but too numerous to relate, and last of all to deplorable foreign invasions, the history of which we have all read—the crown and sceptre of The O'Ban-Na-Gers (for so the members of this royal family were styled

in the original, the words signifying "the potent rulers of a mighty people") were abolished, the ex-kings were still regarded by their affectionate subjects as natural leaders and heaven-appointed chiefs. "The Emerald Gem of the Western world" had, it is true, been "set in the crown of a stranger," but confiscation of territory does not necessarily imply alienation of love; and although the temporal power of The O'Banaghers had become considerably diminished, the representatives of the house continued to reign in the hearts of a devoted people, who looked up to them with that beautiful natural allegiance so characteristic of "the foineest pisantry in the wurld."

It is a sad thing to contemplate the decline and fall of empires; and the least sensitive visitor to the curtailed inheritance of this race of Hibernian sovereigns must feel a little of what the late Mr. Gibbon experienced as he sat musing amid the ruins of the Capitol at Rome. "The O'Banagher Estates"—as they are airily described by the tenantry round about—consist of about thirty acres of land, in the centre of which stands Castle Banagher, a large and dismal mansion occupying the very site upon which the royal residence once stood.

The present monarch was at the date of this story the representative in Imperial Parliament of Ballymarun, near to which town his property was situated. He held the seat with the approval of Mr. Murphy, the editor of the *Ballymarun Eagle*. The O'Banagher was a little man. He did not exceed five feet by more than half an inch. His round head was becoming bald, but what hair he had was exceedingly brilliant. His whiskers were even ruddier in hue than the hair that encircled his head; though a few grey locks sprinkled on both head and face told, with other signs, of a man rapidly approaching his fiftieth year. A decided squint in his left eye diminished rather than increased the natural dignity of his appearance; and his corpulent little person betokened good living, with a healthy enjoyment of the same.

It was a fine frosty morning—the month of March was but a few days old—and The O'Banagher, arrayed in the gay uniform of the Ballymarun Hunt, sat over his bachelor breakfast attended by his faithful domestic, Larry—a good-natured creature, of preposterous height, who discharged a variety of



functions, ordinary and confidential, in Castle Banagher. The room in which The O'Banagher breakfasted overlooked a not very well-kept lawn. On the walls hung a number of portraits of ancient monarchs in long white beards and wonderful gowns. Some of them carried sceptres, while others were without that badge of office. The paintings were all modern—being, indeed, the work of a Cork artist—but the subjects were all of considerable antiquity, the frame of the most venerable bearing an inscription that the gentleman depicted had died in the year 3045 B.C., at the advanced age of 253, deeply regretted by a large and sorrowing circle of acquaintances.

Fin MacCool, the name which The O'Banagher had patriotically bestowed upon his favourite horse, was impatiently pawing the ground in front of the house. The O'Banagher had finished his breakfast; Larry was filling the honourable member's flask with sherry; everything was in readiness for his departure. The time had arrived when he should think of starting for the "meet." At that important moment, who should arrive on the scene but Mr. Murphy, in a great perspiration, demanding to see the master of the house. He made his bow, and blurted out, in a series of pants—

"I want to spake wid ye, O'Banagher—privately."

"Great heavens! I'm just on my way out. I can't, really. Won't some other time do?"

"No, begorra, it's a matter of life an' death; but I won't keep you more than tin minutes."

The unfortunate man groaned, looked out piteously at Fin MacCool; but he could not afford to offend his most influential supporter, so he led the way into the study. Now what took place at that interview has never transpired; whether they were actually important matters of State which demanded immediate attention, or concerns of a private nature which called for settlement, or some divulgement of threatened danger, or some miserable question about the paving of Ballymarun, can never be known. One thing, however, is quite certain—namely, that the interview lasted exactly forty-five minutes, and when The O'Banagher shook hands with Murphy at the door, his little face was quite red with excitement. Whether that was attributable to the nature of Murphy's disclosures or to the length of them, whether it betokened fear or fury, must remain always

a secret. As Murphy strode down the lawn, The O'Banagher, in the hearing of Larry and the groom, indulged in a series of expressions which were anything but parliamentary.

Fin MacCool gave a snort of relief as his master mounted and rode off. The member's mind was full of conflicting emotions, but was chiefly engaged in anticipating a meeting with a certain Miss Mulligan, who had engaged his royal attention at the last hunt ball. He had not gazed upon her since that festive occasion—at least, not with the bodily eye, though daily and nightly his mental gaze was sustained by cheerful visions of her face. He had secretly determined that he would embrace the opportunity which this day offered of distinguishing himself in the field. He would prove to her by doughty deeds that his physical gifts were by no means inferior to his mental endowments. A vision of Miss Mulligan immersed in the billows of Aughloyne brook, and of himself dashing wildly into the surging stream and triumphantly rescuing her from imminent death, had several times presented itself to his kindly imagination as a delicious possibility; or her horse might take fright suddenly, and rush with headlong speed across a dangerous country; then, with super-equine strides, should Fin MacCool nobly o'ertake the lesser steed, and his rider bravely save a precious life. These dreams were somewhat blurred as The O'Banagher pressed forward towards the meet at Knox's Corner.

He made Fin MacCool do wonders in that short distance. Cottages, hedges, stone-breakers, geese, children, sped past him as he had never seen them speed before, except when sitting behind a locomotive. But, alas! for the futility of human wishes—the vanity of even the most inspiring emanations of the brain; when he arrived at Knox's Corner, the whole party had ridden off, except somebody or other's servant, who sat on a pony, surveying the horizon. This menial, observing a belated member of the Ballymarun Hunt, addressed him in condoling accents.

"Och! sor, what kep ye at all, at all?"

"Where are they gone, man?" inquired The O'Banagher, evincing a not unnatural impatience.

"Why, sure they rode off half an hour ago. They're goin' to dhrav Ballyhooley Slope, and it's a devil av a hurry they were in intirely."

"Any ladies present?" asked The O'Banagher, placing his eye-glass in his eye.

"Only Miss Mulligan, sor, an' she looked grand. May I niver stir out av this, if she didn't look a pictur'!"

"Shut up, and be hanged to you!" replied the member, with unnecessary energy. "You say they went to Ballyhooley Slope?"

"Divil a place else, sor. It's meself believes that O'Connor the huntsman has a fox shut up in a box there, to let him out whin he hears the 'Tally-ho!' he talks so confident about findin' wan."

"Mind your own business, sir. I dare say I'll overtake them."

"Well, yer honour, av *you* don't do it, there's not another in the country can, an' so I'm a tellin' ye."

"Get out, you villain!" replied The O'Banagher, greatly pleased notwithstanding.

So the proprietor of Castle Banagher and somebody or other's servant parted, the latter seated on an animal which he could with ease have lifted from the ground, the former perched on the gigantic back of the renowned Fin MacCool. Crashing through a thin hedge into the adjoining meadow, The O'Banagher was soon speeding towards Ballyhooley. It was a splendid morning: just enough of frost in the air to give a stimulus to the blood. The atmosphere was thin and bright. One could see for miles and miles on all sides, and every sound sent forth—the talk of labourers four fields off, the bark of a dog in a farmyard, the crowing of cocks, and even the "grunt, grunt" of the proverbial pig—was conveyed to the ear with strange distinctness. But there was no sound of the music of the hunt, no echo of the dogs' chorus; although the impatient rider, having done his three miles in an incredibly short space of time, was now nearing Ballyhooley Slope.

When he arrived at the spot all was as desolate as a graveyard. There was neither sign nor sound to indicate the neighbourhood of his brethren of the chase. The O'Banagher drew up by a stiff covert, and indulged in a whole volley of expletives. Attracted by this burst of blasphemy, a rustic who was doing something with a spade at the other side of the thicket, shyly approached, and gazed with awe upon the glorious apparition. Really The O'Banagher didn't look badly in his uniform—at least, when mounted, and was calculated, notwith-

standing his diminutive stature, to create astonishment in the bosom of the simple labourer. The voice from the summit of Fin MacCool put the stereotyped question to the admiring native—

"Had he seen the hunt go by?"

"Och, divil a hunt, yer honour. But there was little Jemmy Donovan, sor, I heerd him say that a fox broke cover down by Dennis's barn, and that he heerd the 'Tally-ho!' himself, and seen the redcoats, sor."

"And where the deuce is this barn you talk about?"

"Is it Dennis's barn, sor? Why, it's beyant the hill there, sor; now it's as straight as ever ye can go, sor."

"And how far?"

"Well, now, it might be five miles be the road—more or less, you know, sor—an' maybe three or four, or thereabouts, av ye crass ould Croly's farm."

"Then I *will* cross old Croly's farm. Out of the way, there."

So saying, he pitched a coin to the man with the spade, and was soon plunging through "ould" Croly's favourite turnip field. The ingenious labourer had certainly understated the distance of Dennis's barn, when he put it at three or four miles. When The O'Banagher reached the other side of the hill, and came in sight of the institution described to him, he looked round in blank astonishment, for not only was there no trace of his companions in arms, but he was gazing round a part of the country which, though it looked eminently suited for a good run, was by no means familiar to him. He pulled up by the side of a brook that babbled down the hill, put his glass in his eye, but descried no well-known feature—

"Within the Land debatable."

He took his sherry flask out of his pocket, and filled the glittering silver drinking cup. He indulged in a long and steady pull at the contents. He then addressed to the attentive shrubs a number of observations, more or less uncomplimentary, concerning the peasant with the spade who had so obligingly misdirected him.

It was a pleasant country, nicely undulating. Thick plantations surrounded the meadows and skirted the boreens. The roofs of cabins peeped here and there from behind ditches. Harrows lay beside iron gates—never padlocked. A dull crow was skimming along the hard surface of the

ground in expectation of a worm; and, disappointed, uttered lugubriously the "caws" of disappointment. But The O'Banagher was blind to the beauties of beneficent nature, and scanning the horizon with his eye-glass, swore quietly to himself. Suddenly the glass dropped from his eye. He stretched forward. Fin MacCool pricked his ears. Was not that the baying of the pack? Yes, surely! Thrice-blessed zephyrs, coming his way, were laden with a cheerful message. The rustic had not been mendacious, after all. The hunt was at hand. Assuring himself of the direction of the sound, the doughty horseman dashed forward once more.

If he rode hard before, you may imagine how he rode now. Fin MacCool's legs stretched out before and behind as though they never touched the ground, and their proprietor were flying. The O'Banagher, encased in mud—for he had traversed an occasional bog—bobbed up and down on the summit of the horse, his little coat-tails and his eye-glass flying out straight behind him. He did several miles in this mad manner, taking everything before him—brooks, hedges, stone walls. He nearly took a haystack; but Fin MacCool shirked it, and, galloping round, landed his master right in the middle of a farmyard, to the great surprise of a rabble rout of pigs and poultry. The occupants of the farmhouse and the people from the yard came forward, and, forming a circle round horse and rider, commenced scratching their heads and grinning. The O'Banagher was out of breath, and couldn't utter a syllable. At last one of the men ventured an observation—

"Foine day, sor," says he.

"Ay, glory be to God," says another, emboldened by the courageous example of his brother-agriculturist. "Sure, it's splendid weather that's in it."

The O'Banagher having by this time regained his breath, put to them the customary inquiry. But they had heard nothing of the hunt, nor seen any one belonging to it. Perhaps they were at the plantation, a mile farther off on the main road. That was a great place for foxes—a great place entirely. Had heard strange noises in that direction, now they thought of it. The unfortunate senator, who, in the simplicity of his heart, habitually believed the statements of his fellow-creatures, immediately argued—

"The sound that I heard, and the sound

heard by these intelligent peasants, must have been one and the same sound. I'll just ride in that direction."

A deputation of intelligent peasants conducted him through a boreen into the road, pointed out the direction of the plantation, and the undaunted sportsman pressed forward once again. He reached the plantation, and found—nothing.

He had had a hard morning's work. He consulted his watch, and found to his horror that it was three o'clock. He looked round the landscape, and discovered to his horror that he hadn't the remotest idea as to where he was. Utterly jaded, disgusted, and disappointed, he determined to return home. How to do it? Just then he caught sight of a venerable old man sitting by the roadside, engaged in the monotonous occupation of breaking stones. He was also engaged in smoking a short pipe.

"Can you tell me, my good man, which is the most direct road to Castle Banagher?"

"To where, sor?" asked the evidently amazed stone-breaker.

"To Castle Banagher. My goodness, man, have you never heard of Castle Banagher?"

The proprietor of that fortress thought that it was as far-famed a public building as Notre Dame, or St. Paul's, or the Capitol.

"Heerd tell av it? Castle Banagher? Let—me—see. No. I've lived, man and boy, about these parts for the last sixty-seven years, an' may this pipe be smoked across my grave av ever I heerd tell av Castle Banagher before."

"You know Ballymarun, don't you?"

"Well, yer honour, I've heerd tell av it. I'm no traveller meself, sor. It's along the Isnagarran-road, isn't it?"

"Confound it! that's what I'm asking you."

"Oh, well, then, it *is* along the Isnagarran-road. First turnin' to yer right, an' then it's as straight as ye can go, sor."

When an Irishman has only the very slightest acquaintance with a route—indeed, often when he is completely ignorant of it—he adopts the formula, "as straight as you can go," perhaps for the purpose of concealing his ignorance under a well-assumed bluster, or perhaps from a desire to leave you pretty much to your own discretion. Because, of course, to yourself alone is known how straight you *can* go.

The O'Banagher took the Isnagarran-

road. At that moment he was nearly thirty miles from Castle Banagher, and was travelling away from it. To crown his misfortunes, Fin MacCool had fallen lame, and was limping badly. The rider dismounted, and on examining the poor beast, found his foreleg seriously cut. The afternoon had advanced considerably by this time. There was not a soul stirring. The oppressive silence had a deadening effect on the senator. He was too much cut up to swear even. He stood by the side of his horse—too considerate to tax him further—and waited patiently on Providence. Presently he was revived by the sound of shouts proceeding from a distance down the road, and immediately afterwards he observed, coming in his direction, what appeared at first sight to be an ordinary cart, surrounded by a small mob of ordinary peasants. As the cavalcade approached, however, he was able to distinguish the various figures in the group, and recognized them as actors in a national drama which would be termed by the irreverent farcical, and by the lover of poetry romantic.

On the cart was spread a mattress, and on the mattress sat or reclined a young man adorned with new corduroys, a resplendent red waistcoat, and a caubeen of durable felt. By his side sat a girl of great beauty, also in gay holiday attire. Her striped cotton dress of blue contrasted effectively with the bright red kerchief fastened round her neck. She was of that type of Irish beauty common in Galway, but not frequently encountered so far south—with masses of black hair, big black eyes, and olive complexion. She was glancing down at one of her fingers, which bore the unaccustomed ornament of a ring.

The young man in the red waistcoat was endeavouring to appear unconscious of the fact that he was a principal actor in the scene, and was replying, with a very poor effort at nonchalance, to the numerous witticisms of his pedestrian friends. However, it was useless to conceal the fact. He had just been married to the colleen by his side, and both were being driven home on the bride's dowry—the mattress. The whiskey bottle was circulating freely, snatches of songs were sung, echoes of laughter lingered in the air, while ever and anon a reveller friskier than the rest would detach himself from the group, and commence dancing a jig by the roadside. The horse was led by a boy, whose costume seemed to consist of

half a dozen large rags, attached by strings to various parts of his person. Beside the boy strode a big beggar, whose squalor was appalling, and the multiplicity of whose rags defied arithmetic. In his hand he carried a staff, long enough to reach his shoulder. Various wallets depending from his neck contained refreshments, solid and fluid. The expression of his countenance was extremely villainous. Thick, dirty, matted hair hung in disgusting clots about his forehead. His eyes were bloodshot, and he was muttering to himself untranslatable words—blessings or maledictions none knew but himself. He was the bocough, the wedding beggar.

Apart from the noise and jubilant groups came two silent figures, walking slowly behind the bridal chariot. The one, an old crone, whose face was almost completely concealed by the hood of her long cloak drawn over her head. In her left hand she held a stick, and leaned with her right upon the shoulder of her companion, a young girl, whose eyes were red with weeping, and whose light and lustrous hair, dishevelled, hung about her shoulders. Ever and anon the girl heaved a piteous sigh; and a great unbidden tear would balance itself for a moment under her eyelid, and then trickle suddenly down her blanched cheek—demonstrations noticed but unchecked by the old woman at her side. It was strange to see so piteous a face surrounded by so much good-humoured abandon.

The O'Banagher, gorgeously attired, standing in the middle of the road, and examining his horse's leg with a tender solicitude, could not but attract the attention of the merry group. A "gentleman" is always sure of a large amount of respect from Irish peasantry, although personally unknown to those who accord it. And notwithstanding the extent to which the malt had circulated, and the height to which the hilarity had reached, a reverential silence fell upon the wedding party as they approached the dismounted horseman. The "boys" commenced bowing and scraping to The O'Banagher, and would have passed him shyly; but that gentleman, for reasons sufficiently obvious, called out to them, with all the patronizing familiarity of a feudal chief—"Well, boys, how are you? Won't you give me leave to drink the bride's health?"

In obedience to this good-natured but peremptory summons, the caravan halted,

and The O'Banagher was speedily surrounded by sympathetic admirers. A chorus arose of "God bless ye, sir," "It's yerself is the kyind gentleman, entirely," "Arrah, long life to yer honour." While audible female whispers of "Sure, isn't it a bewtiffle coat?" "Musha, now Kathleen, look at thim buttons!" "In throth, he's a rale gintleman, an' no mishtake," mingled with the rougher notes of exclamation. These and other complimentary observations were cut short by the man with the wallets. He pushed his way roughly into the centre of the group, and stood before The O'Banagher, who looked up at him in considerable dismay; and, indeed, a more repulsive-looking creature it would be difficult to encounter.

"Hwhat's the matther with yer honour?" asked the bocough.

As the intentions of the monster were apparently inoffensive, The O'Banagher explained briefly that he had lost his way; that his horse had fallen lame; and that he would feel extremely obliged by safe conduct to a house of entertainment for man and beast.

"Be the mass, thin, yer honor's in luck's way this blessed evenin'; for it's to Mrs. Connor's shebeen we're goin', where the entertainment is av the most refined description. Here, Pauden, take hould av the gintleman's horse."

The lad who was leading the horse of the wedding cart handed his whip to a substitute, and took the reins of Fin MacCool.

"Sure yer honor 'll not walk?" asked the polite but ragged beggar.

The O'Banagher preferred walking. The bocough urged. The O'Banagher insisted. However, the bridegroom, unwilling to be outdone, vacated his position beside the fair Peggy, avowing that "the devil a bit he'd be sated an' see a gintleman walking the roads. Sure it's himself 'ud be the proud man that day, av his honor 'ud only consent to take his place."

Overcome by the number and warmth of the invitations, and unwilling to offend his new acquaintances by a non-compliance that might be attributed to upstart pride, The O'Banagher determined to accept the kindly offer; and was immediately hoisted upon the mattress, and sat down complacently by the side of the lovely Peggy. The position was a delicate one, and the attitude somewhat undignified. But the

Isnagarran-road was not Pall Mall, and one might do things on the former which one would scarcely care to perform on the latter thoroughfare. It doesn't do to be always conscious of one's dignity. Why, there's not one of us that isn't, according to Mr. Tennyson, "the heir of all the ages in the foremost files of time"—a reflection that would render existence insupportable, only that we consent to be persistently oblivious of it.

The bocough came round to The O'Banagher's side of the cart, and showered upon him benedictions in unknown tongues, as the procession started amid a universal cheer. The member for the borough of Ballymarun was really the kindest and most gallant of mortals, and as he put his glass in his eye, and surveyed his lovely companion, he appreciated the delicacy of the situation: he blushed a blush deeper than the dye of his coat. The signal was responded to by the lady's cheeks. She didn't seem to relish the exchange at all, and was, indeed, covered with confusion. Pat, meanwhile, the de-throned bridegroom, lit his dudheen, and trudged by the side of the vehicle, keeping a sharp eye upon The O'Banagher, evidently prepared to resent any attempt at flirtation.

Becoming gradually accustomed to the position, but striving to conceal an awkwardness of which he felt supremely conscious, The O'Banagher determined to exercise his well-known conversational powers for the amusement of the bride. His attempts would probably have been crowned with greater success, but for the roughness of the road. Isnagarran-road is one of the worst in Munster; full of deep ruts and prodigious stones hostile to the beast of burden. It was really vexatious, just after the delivery of some little witticism, to be thrown right into Peggy's lap; or occasionally to be pitched almost off the cart by an unexpected lurch of the vehicle to the other side. To this day it is a marvel to The O'Banagher how Peggy kept her seat at all; for keep it she did, unmoved by the erratic motions of the chariot.

"It's a rough road to travel on, mavourneen," said The O'Banagher, regaining the seat from which he had been for the fourth time dislodged.

"Thrue for ye, sir," said Peggy, with a smile.

"I trust that your road through life will

have fewer obstacles in it," said the gallant senator, growing metaphorical.

"Faith, I hope so, sir," replied Peggy, looking fondly down at Pat—a look that said, "So long as his strong arms are at my disposal, I haven't much to fear from obstacles."

"Boys, won't you sing something?" The O'Banagher asked, after a pause of some minutes.

The boys, ever ready to oblige a gentleman, after a short discussion among themselves, put forward one of their number, who, after scratching his head and screwing up his face in an agonizing effort of memory, commenced singing, in a most lugubrious tone, the following words, everybody joining in the chorus, while The O'Banagher beat time, and even gave occasional vocal assistance to the minstrels:—

"Och, Biddy Machree, sure you've stolen my heart,  
An' berrid it deep in the mowld, love;  
For yerself is dhruv home on Pat Donovan's cart,  
And meself is left out in the cowl'd, love.

Chorus: And meself is left out in the cowl'd.

Och, Biddy Machree, sure it's cruel ye were  
To lave me so lonely an' sad, dear;  
Wid eyes full ov tears, an' heart black wid care,  
An' me feelin' uncommonly bad, dear.

Chorus: For meself is left out in the cowl'd.

Och, Biddy Machree, sure I bear no ill will  
To yerself or the boy ov yer choice, dear;  
An' if me gay spirit yer cowl'dness should kill,  
Sure down in me grave I'll rejoice, dear.

Chorus: For meself is left out in the cowl'd.

Och, Biddy Machree, sure I hope ye'll survive  
All the thrials an' troubles ov life, dear,  
An' whin Paddy is dead, av yerself be alive,  
Troth, Micky 'll make ye his wife, dear."

Chorus: For meself is left out in the cowl'd."

The tune to which this precious composition was sung was one of those wild Irish chants which have come down, like the wild Irish legends and the descendants of Irish kings, from a very remote period of the world's history. The chorus was howled with great fervour by the whole party, and accompanied with as much gesticulation as was possible during a march. The shrill, clear voices of the women wailed high above the masculine notes, yielding an effect strange and not without a certain uncouth charm. Other melodies followed, but the jaded statesman had ceased to pay them much attention. The first and scarcely perceptible shadows of evening were beginning to lengthen along the meadows, and the great man was thinking sadly of—dinner. Meanwhile, Peggy in the cart was gazing

with respectful awe upon his rich costume of red and white and gilt, the pink tops of his boots, his wonderful spurs, the black round hunting cap perched upon his auburn locks; and no doubt she had her own ideas about the personal charms of the wearer, with his funny little legs and his queer little squint.

"I suppose we'll soon be there," said The O'Banagher, suddenly awaking from his reverie; and without the slightest notion as to where "there" was.

"Sure, we're just at it, sir. There it is, beyant there."

"Where?" said The O'Banagher, turning his head towards the horse, and peering down a road, upon which he could distinguish no object save the two lines of trees stretching interminably before him.

"There, sir; don't you see the thatch beyant the chestnut yonder, and the shmoke? Sure, it's wonderin' what's keepin' us they'll be."

But The O'Banagher failed to distinguish the objects so easily detected by the sharp vision of his companion; and muttering to himself several sentences depicting, metaphorically but reproachfully, the conduct of the Fates in surrounding him with circumstances so unexpected and so unkindly, he resigned himself once more to meditation. The whiskey went round with increased rapidity. The melodies became bacchanalian in subject and boisterous in execution. The bo-cough's utterance had grown husky. Pat's pipe was out. Fin MacCool limped badly, following his ragged groom. The strange, silent pair—the old crone and her fair young companion with the pale face—walked wearily on, still apart and still silent. The long shadows across the meadows were deepening and lengthening, and the sun was red in the sky, when the whole party suddenly halted before a little roadside inn, hidden away among chestnut trees. It was a white-washed house of one storey. Creepers grew up towards the thatch; and over the door was a black board, about two feet in length, on which was inscribed, in white and halting capitals—

"MRS. CONNOR, LICENSED TO SELL  
TEA AND TOBACCO."





## THE ABDUCTION OF THE O'BANAGHER.

### CHAPTER II.

MRS. CONNOR was the mother of the bride, and stood in the doorway of her cottage, waiting to welcome her children. Half the country-side seemed to have assembled at the house to greet the returning party, and one or two of them, greater travellers than the rest, discovered the identity of their chance guest, whose name was known to all. The intelligence soon went round. Attentions were showered upon the head of the worthy gentleman as he descended from the conveyance, tearing the mattress with his spur during the transit. For a moment he was a greater object of interest than even Peggy herself; and when Mrs. Connor came forward to receive the newly-married pair, she extended a welcome to The O'Banagher with an amount of respectful effusion most agreeable to witness. Mrs. Connor, however, was not a woman of mere words. On ascertaining the cause of The O'Banagher's presence, the motherly creature allowed her kindness to take a practical form. Fin MacCool was taken round to the little stable, a message was despatched to the nearest horse-doctor, and the illustrious arrival was conducted into the kitchen, amid many apologies for its poor appearance and homely furniture. He had only to make himself as comfortable as circumstances would permit.

The guests meanwhile filed through the passage that traversed the house, and proceeded to a barn at the rear of the premises, which had been fitted up for dancing.



Mrs. Connor remained behind, to supply the wants of her guest.

"It's a poor place for the likes of yer honour to put up wid, but it's clane and wholesome, sor; and if there's anything you'd like to take now, sure it's meself 'ill get it for ye wid a heart and a halt."

"My good creature, the place is really charming—upon my soul, it is now; and if you'd just let me go somewhere and have a wash, and get me something to eat—anything, I don't care what—it's infinitely obliged to you I'd be, Mrs. Connor."

Mrs. Connor bustled in and out of the room, bringing with her articles of the toilet. First, an immense wooden basin, primitive in shape, but surprisingly clean; then a large stone jug, containing water; then a towel and a piece of soap; and lastly, the smallest possible piece of looking-glass. These trophies she arranged on a low table in a distant corner of the apartment. Thither she finally conveyed a clothes-horse of gigantic proportions, and covered with linen. With this improvised screen, she shut off the corner; and with profuse apologies, but with added assurances that his honour would prefer it to the bed-rooms, she conducted the O'Banagher towards the screen, opened it to let him enter, closed it again, and soon had the satisfaction of hearing his honour spluttering and scrubbing at a great rate. The hospitable soul then set about making preparations for a meal; and by the time the guest had finished his ablutions, a collation of cold chicken and ham and hot potatoes was laid upon the table for his accommodation. The O'Banagher emerged—red from the friction of a very rough towel, but smiling good-humouredly.

"Upon my honour, Mrs. Connor, that dressing-room of yours is as comfortable as and a deal cleaner than the lavatories at our old Club."

The evil temper of the morning had evidently blown over. He had determined to make the best of a bad case. There was no earthly use in upbraiding fate. Fate was so decidedly prejudiced against him, that he would gain a decided advantage over fate by concealing his chagrin. And after all, when he considered all the circumstances of the case—Well, things might have been much worse. There were certain sad reflections, certainly: his absence from home, the lameness of his horse, the anxiety of his servants, the confusion at Castle

Banagher, and—saddest reflection of all—the failure of his plans matured for the captivity of Miss Mulligan. On the other hand, he reflected, gratefully, "I am well entertained by an amusing people. I am an honoured guest at a delightful wedding party. I am sitting before an ample repast, prepared by the skilful hands of a charming hostess." So the little monarch accepted his fate contentedly, and was soon eagerly devouring the simple but capital dinner before him. The oft-recurring Alfred in the neather's hut was not a spectacle more edifying.

Shouts of laughter, strains of music, the loud reverberation of double shuffles, were borne into the kitchen from the barn at the rear. But although Mrs. Connor made an occasional allusion to the proceedings outside, she did not once speak of joining the revellers till her guest, avowing he hadn't eaten so hearty a meal in his whole life before, threw himself back in his chair, and surveyed the fragments of the feast. Not exactly knowing how he would receive the invitation, the hostess inquired cautiously and negatively—

"P'raps yer honour wouldn't care to see the dancing?"

"Wouldn't care! Nonsense, Mrs. Connor; why, that's the identical object I have in view in waiting at all." Saying which, he arose and offered his arm to Mrs. Connor, who timidly accepted the honour. They stumbled through the back-yard—full of deep holes where the pigs rooted, and where stagnant water always lay—past the hayrick, through the gate, and stood before the open door of the barn. It was a fine scene. Candles thrust into primitive sockets stood out from the walls, and—caught by the draught from the door, and the motions of the air given by the rush of the dancers—threw an uncertain and romantic light on everything. There was no attempt at decoration. Rude forms drawn up along the sides of the room received the exhausted dancers, but most of those not engaged in "welting the flure" preferred to sit on the ground itself. In the centre of the barn was a large board (possibly the barn door), upon which Terpsichorean duels were fought with great skill and daring. A blind fiddler, of wonderful vigour and unflinching good temper, supplied the entire of the musical portion of the entertainment, assisted now and then by one of the boys,

who would whistle a bar or two when the violin showed tokens of weariness.

The frolic at times amounted to wild abandon, and yet an observer had no fear of the loud licence degenerating into debauchery. It was a picture for Wilkie, not for Hogarth. So free a revel could be safe only under exceptional conditions. It was a memory of an older and a healthier world, a scene impossible out of Ireland. Into the philosophy of the fact we need not enter; but here are three conflicting theories proposing to account for it. Philosopher number one alleges it as a proof of barbarism; number two traces it to the fact that the Irish are naturally the most virtuous people on the face of the earth; number three attributes it to the influence of the confessional—oblivious for the moment of the history of that institution in continental countries, and the moral condition of the countries where it has flourished longest.

As The O'Banagher entered, a pair of dancers occupied the barn door, dancing a jig to a tune and with an amount of action which would surprise the agile young persons who nightly illustrate the works of burlesque writers. The blind fiddler, drawing inspiration from the sound of the feet, waxed more fast and furious; the lookers-on shouted loud encouragement—till at last one of the two succumbed through sheer exhaustion. Then the fiddle ceased, and cheers went up on high in honour of the victorious jigster. The whiskey bottle went round again and again, the bocough refreshing himself with copious gulps. The girls were kissed with fervour and frequency. The old people sat apart, and conversed in Irish about domestic affairs.

The O'Banagher's name and titles being by this time known to every one present, his graceful condescension became the subject of comment, not always whispered. When, furthermore, it transpired that all the liquor consumed was to be paid for out of his honour's private purse, the enthusiasm was boundless; and the boys determined to prove their appreciation of this act of generosity by taking the fullest advantage of it. When, furthermore, it became generally known that The O'Banagher had presented the bride with a five-pound Bank of Ireland note, all the women fell in love with him, and sang his praises with genuine feeling.

"Sure, he was a rale gentleman entirely."

"Musha, it's meself 'ud be willing to serve the likes of him."

"His sowl 'll rest in glory for it, anyhow."

"Divil a bit av the likes av it I ever seen at all, at all."

"Isn't he the purty-lookin' gintleman, too, alana?"

These and such as these were the compliments that buzzed about The O'Banagher's ears, delighted to accept them. He was beginning to enter thoroughly into the scene now, and grew every moment more and more excited. The chorus of adulation reached its climax when his honour, divested of his spurs, approached Peggy, and asked her to dance a jig with him. She assented to his request, and he led her blushing to the barn door.

Never was witnessed such an outburst of enthusiasm. The occupants of the barn left their places by the walls to cluster round the interesting performers. If the whole House of Commons had been there at that moment, it wouldn't have mattered to The O'Banagher. It was a grand sight to see the little chieftain footing it with all the energy of a gay young peasant, bobbing up and down, rolling his head from side to side, now with his arms akimbo, now lifting them in the air, and cracking his fingers as if in jovial defiance of custom; now entwining his arm in that of his partner, and twirling round in the centre of the board; now taking his place at the end farthest from her, and bobbing madly up and down again—as the fiddler moved his bow with new energy, as the spectators shouted approval, as the women alternately laughed and cried with delight, as the very candles flickered with excitement. At last, thoroughly exhausted, the perspiration pouring down his face, the festive senator shouted to the blind orchestra to stop; and, kissing his fair partner, led her back to the astonished object of her affections.

At this juncture, while the shouts of admiration were ringing among the blackened rafters, occurred one of those painful scenes often witnessed at a wedding in the south of Ireland. The old woman with the fair young companion, who had silently followed the procession along the road, had been present during the whole evening, unnoticed by The O'Banagher. He had, indeed, observed the young girl dancing in a wild way when he first entered the barn—her light hair un-

fastened and flying behind her, and her shrill whoop ringing above the voices of the rest. He had not, however, identified her as the figure in the procession. At the moment, however, when he was restoring Peggy to the side of her husband, the old woman, leaving a dark corner at the extreme end of the barn, tottered up to the married couple, conducting her young protégée by the hand. When she stood before them, a dead silence fell upon the whole assembly. She threw her cloak from over her head with an intensely dramatic action. She was evidently of extreme age, but her face bore ineffaceable traces of early beauty. Her withered skin was white as snow, and her eye shone with a lustre that had something terrible in it. She threw her hands above her head, and began to utter with fierce volubility a torrent of Irish words.

Peggy hid her face in her husband's bosom, and sobbed piteously; while her husband hung his head, and assumed an expression of extreme sheepishness. The girl of the golden hair, holding the skirt of the speaker's dress, looked at the pair proudly and defiantly, out of eyes from which anger, pride, and excitement had dried up all the tears. At the same moment that the old woman commenced her effective tirade, the bocough, who had divested himself of neither rags nor wallets, took his place by the side of the bride, and holding his dirty hands over her head in an attitude of benediction, began muttering sentences with a volubility not inferior to that of the woman. The wild tones of the old woman rose higher and higher. The mutterings of the bocough became more vehement and less distinct. Pieces of money were meanwhile thrust into one of his open wallets, both by the bridegroom and the guests. Poor Peggy's cries sounded most piteously; and when, with a fierce concluding menace and a fiercer denunciatory gesture, the woman ceased, she shrieked out as if from a sudden pang of pain, and fell back fainting into her husband's arms. The woman then drew the cloak about her head, and kissing the forehead of the girl by her side, led her from the place with proud but faltering footsteps. The strange pair walked out into the night, and did not return. The bocough continued to mutter his benedictions over the senseless girl—strange blessings in that uncouth no-language known in Ireland as bog-Latin. Peggy at length revived, was kissed by her companions, and

was led away by her husband from the scene so suddenly rendered terrible to her. Then the dancing recommenced. Peace was restored. Hilarity became the order of the night.

A word of comment on the singular drama just enacted. Although virtuous attachments are—for reasons best known to philosophers—time-honoured institutions in the land, it cannot be affirmed that the Irish peasant, masculine gender, is the most constant of mortals. The reverse, indeed, is the case. Often untrue to his early love, and always influenced more or less by considerations of a pecuniary nature, he may justly be set down as fickle. He has frequently been known to throw over Molly, whose dowry consisted of a bed and a pig, for Peggy, who in addition to the bed and the pig had a couple of sovereigns in a stocking. The Irish girl, however, is not so fickle in her nature as the Irish boy. When she loves, she loves with all her heart; and once slighted, she never forgives. Unable, and often unwilling, to embrace the vulgar vengeance afforded by a court of law, she sets in motion a poetical revenge of her own, more satisfactory to her feelings than the monetary consolation accorded by a jury. She attends the wedding of the faithless swain—is present like a dark shadow all through the ceremony—dances like a wild thing at the party that closes the day witnessing the death of her love. Throughout the day she is accompanied by her oldest female relative—a grandmother, sometimes a great-grandmother, who, at a suitable moment, arises and curses the new-made bride with intense bitterness. Upon her, upon her husband, upon her children yet to be, upon her house and property, she calls upon high Heaven to send sickness and death, and blackness and destruction. At times these maledictions surge into the domain of absolute poetry; while at times they are but the feeble drivellings of an idiotic crone. But none dare interrupt the flow of malediction. Her words are sacred—standing as she does upon the confines of a spirit-world soon to be entered by her. She addresses herself to an imaginative and altogether superstitious audience. No denunciations of Oriental prophets and of ages gone by could have had a greater terror for their hearers than hers have, spoken before an intelligent peasantry at this advanced period of our planet's history.

But though those interested do not dare to interrupt the curses, they are permitted to adopt such steps as may divert them. To this end the bocough is employed, to utter blessings; and blessings from that estimable creature are sought and paid for. For every prophecy of shame and sorrow he presages honour and joy. Instead of sickness he gives health. For early death he promises long life. By this ceremony the sting is supposed to be effectually drawn from the horrible maledictions of the accusing crone.

This strange scene had a very depressing effect on the spirits of The O'Banagher. The departure of Peggy, too, he regarded as a decided affliction. True to his oratorical instincts, he could not think of leaving the barn without addressing a few observations to the boys. So he mounted a form, and made a little speech, humorously enjoining upon them the duty of matrimony, and requesting them, in conclusion, to join him in drinking the health of the bride and bridegroom. This exercise occupied some time, as the bottles and glasses present were not equal in number to the mouths; but it was at last satisfactorily accomplished. Then one of the boys, mounting another form, called lustily for "Three cheers for The O'Banagher." Three resounding cheers were given. The chieftain bowed to his friends, shouted "Good night!" and, followed by Mrs. Connor, stumbled out into the starlight, leaving the boys to their devices.

Now it was clearly impossible for his honour to return that night to Castle Banagher, or even to Ballymarun. Fin MacCool couldn't be moved for a day at least. There was no other horse in the place. Besides, The O'Banagher didn't know the way. But Bianconi's car passed the door in the morning, and went very near Ballymarun, if his honour would only wait. Well, his honour determined that he *would* wait. Mrs. Connor's bed-rooms—the good woman explained—were by no means the sort of apartments she'd think of allowing his honour to sleep in. But she'd fix him up a bed in the kitchen behind the clothes-horse, where his honour would be quite snug and private. The bed was duly made—a blazing fire lighted in the grate—the key of the kitchen handed to his honour.

Mrs. Connor withdrew. The O'Banagher,

thoroughly done up, divested himself of some of his upper garments, dived behind the clothes-horse, threw himself on to the bed, and in five minutes was fast asleep.

## THE ABDUCTION OF THE O'BANAGHER.

### CHAPTER III.

WITHIN the enclosure of the clothes-horse The O'Banagher slumbered peacefully. From his usually demonstrative nose there came never a sound. His gentle breathing was light as an infant's. Calm and cheerful memories inspired his visions. A delightful past created for him an impossibly peaceful future. The noisy guests passed through the house on their way homeward. But at that moment he was proceeding down the aisle of a cathedral, with a lovely vision in white leaning upon his arm. They were advancing towards an altar, which, as they approached, receded and diminished, and eventually disappeared in the deceptive distance. The banging of a door caused a reverberation that must have struck the sleeping ear; but its owner was then addressing the House of Commons in strains of unexampled eloquence, so that the sound of the door was drowned in the applause that followed his peroration. Mrs. Connor, moving to and fro in an adjacent apartment, disturbed him not. He was during that interval scouring a vast territory full of stiff coverts—a thousand foxes dashed before him, ten thousand dogs pursued their panting victims, ten thousand members of the Killcot Hunt lagged behind, unable to reach *them*. *Them!*—Miss Mulligan and himself flying across the fields, safe from all pursuit, defying all rivalry. At about two o'clock in the morning The O'Banagher had a dream, which seemed to a mind reposing but reasoning in repose, extremely realistic for a dream. The voices he heard in it were exactly like real voices. He spoke in it himself, and dreamt that he

was conscious that he heard the real tones of his own voice. He was at home, he thought, at Castle Banagher. Larry, his servant, was standing before him in an attitude of respectful remonstrance. He was arguing with him. The master insisted on his own view of the case: Larry insisted on his. Both grew warm. The master became abusive. The servant became impertinent. At last, in reply to some threat of The O'Banagher, Larry shouted out defiantly—

"You're not half a man!"

Now these words, in The O'Banagher's dream, were so very real that he woke up—with a start. There could be no doubt about it. It was a real voice, but not Larry's. The voice continued, in great, gruff tones—

"You're not half a man, Corrigan! Be me sowl, I b'lieve yer no better than a traitor."

To which a piping, asthmatical voice made reply—

"*You're* a traitor for sayin' so. Haven't I taken the oath, man—haven't I taken the oath? An' isn't it trayson agin the society to doubt me?"

"Trayson or no trayson, I'll always doubt the man that has a snakin' regard for the clergy—and that's what you have, Mr. Corrigan—d'ye see?"

"I've no snakin' regards for any one. What regard I have for the clergy I niver consayled, Mr. Brophy—d'ye see?"

"You're a fool, Corrigan!"

"Thank ye kyindly, Brophy."

The O'Banagher was wide enough awake now. This was a phase of realism for which he was quite unprepared, and it was as unwelcome as it was singular. He collected his thoughts—just returning from delightful excursions in the land of dreams—and remembered that he had neglected to lock the door before retiring to rest. After the interchange of compliments between the voices, a pause occurred in the conversation, and The O'Banagher, unable to restrain his curiosity, drew aside a small portion of the linen that hung over the protecting clothes-horse, and peeped out. He was able to distinguish the figures of two men. The one was a man of something like Larry's gigantic proportions, but was considerably older than Larry. He had a shaggy red beard and moustache. His face was bronzed with travel. He wore a

great frieze cloak over his shoulder, and a wide-awake hat of green felt lay on the ground at his feet. His companion was a small, weazened creature, dressed in seedy black. He had the appearance of a lawyer's clerk who had been out of work for a good while. The expression of his face was irresolute, but cunning as the devil's. A whiskey bottle stood on a chair between them. The little man was seated on the table, the other on a low, three-legged stool. The fire was blazing brightly, and a candle stuck in a bottle gave them as much light as they wanted. The big man was smoking a long and rank Continental cigar, and examining the lock of an old pistol. Presently he laid the weapon down on the table, turned to his companion, and said, in a tone that was one-half command and one-half entreaty—

"I tell ye, Corrigan, ye musn't go to confission while ye're in this business—d'ye hear?"

"Och, the devil's cure to ye, man—will ye talk sinse? Why, it's little better than a heretic ye are."

The big man brought down his fist upon the table with a force that shook the little man who sat on it.

"Well, an' supposin' I *am* a heretic! D'ye think I wouldn't glory in it? D'ye think I wouldn't throw up any religion that stood between me an' me counthry? I tell ye, whin Ireland's got her liberty, it'll be time enough to arrange about her religion."

The man on the table whistled slowly, as who should say—

"I decline to argue this question with you."

"Besides, ye cowardly craythur, haven't they denounced ye from the altar?"

"Divil a denounce."

"They've denounced the Faynians."

"Well?"

"*You're* a Faynian."

"Well?"

"Thin they've denounced you—that's logic."

"Begorra, Misther Brophy, I'm sorry for your logic. You've heard it said that all men are liars—haven't ye, Brophy? But you wouldn't knock a man down for sayin' so; though perhaps, if he applied the sayin' to yerself particularly, you might feel inclined to give him just a taste av yer quality."

The big man uttered an oath, and gave it as his opinion that his little friend would chop logic with the devil; to which the little man replied that he chopped logic with Brophy, which was the next thing to it, bedad.

"I wish ye'd look at things in a more insinable way, Brophy," went on the little man called Corrigan. "Sure the priests have always stuck to us; an' although they may seem—mind, I say *seem*—to be agin us now, faith, whin fortune shines on us they'll every wan come round."

"Confound them!" said Brophy, hissing the word between his teeth, and knitting his brows—"who wants them to come round, will ye tell me *that*? D'ye think I'd give twopence to-morrow for the blessins of the black-coated hypocrites that cursed me to-day?"

"There, that'll do, Brophy—that'll do," said Corrigan, crossing himself. "May the Lord forgive ye, for it's a big sin intirely to curse the priests."

"Pshaw!" replied his big companion; "don't be frightened, ma bouchal, yer not in the confissional now. There's no wan listenin' to ye, only meself that has a right to hear. Be the same token, ye don't confiss Faynianism, do ye?"

"Faynianism's not a sin, Brophy, an' I niver confiss anything that isn't. Talk sinse, man alive, talk sinse. Why, I'm as deep in the business as you are, an' I'll be bound I've done as much for the cause too."

"No doubt, Misther Corrigan—no doubt you've done a dale for the cause; but you've made a dale more *out* of the cause, 'wid yer secretaryships and travelin' expinses. Be the holy poker, I always say what I think—and what I'm thinkin now is *this*: that av it ever served yer turn, ye'd inforrum on the whole blessed lot."

"Brophy, av ye weren't a big man—the Lord that made me—I—I—I'd knock ye down."

Brophy gave a derisive chuckle, and glanced contemptuously at the utterer of the threat.

"P'raps ye'd better thry it on, Corrigan. Sure, I've no doubt yer bite is as cruel as yer bark—only I dar say, now, it's in the back of a man's leg ye'd prefer to put yer teeth. Begorra, it's a hard day for poor ould Ireland when she's obliged to take the likes av you into her saycrets."

Corrigan looked reproachfully at his irri-



table companion, and began whining to the accuser—

"Sure, I dunno what's come over ye, man. Is it to get callin' each other names that we meet again after bein' parted so long? Have I iver done anything to make ye think manely of me—have I? Tell me what it is, if I have. Haven't I taken the oath—arn't I exposed to as much danger as yerself, wid all yer palaver?"

"Yer heart's not in it."

"Arrah—why not, now?"

"Sure I see it in yer face, man. Ye've taken the oath—yes; but ye niver contimplate the maning of that oath. You're ready enough to swear; but, be heavens, you're not so ready to take up a gun and march. You think it 'll all come to nothing, an' you *hope* it will."

"Brophy, it's yerself is in it—for no other man dar say as much to me."

Brophy laughed his quiet, contemptuous laugh.

"Don't be standin' on yer dignity, alana, bekase ye'll make me laugh in spite of meself, an' I'm in no laughin' humour. Arrah, Corrigan, d'ye think I can't read ye like a book? The likes av you to be entrusted wid a sacred mission!"

"Sacred mission! Haven't I taken the oath? Wasn't I chosen a delegate? Haven't I worked night an' day for the cause?"

"Worked? Ay, but *how*? Writin' layders and makin' little speeches here and there. But what about the dhills that I set agoin' whin I was here last? How is it you couldn't keep thim up? And where's the pikes that was to be ready, and the stores av powder? No, no, man, ye don't look on this as a rale thing; and if thim ye've sworn in takes their opinions from ye, I wouldn't place much dependence on thim in the day of trouble—that's all."

Corrigan bit his lip, and replied, after a pause—

"You don't expect everybody 'll be just like yerself, Brophy? Wan av us is good at wan thing, and wan av us is good at another. You're a soldier. I'm a politician. I can *write* a better layder than you can; but you can be a better layder than me."

Brophy shrugged his shoulders, and applied himself to the whiskey. He then lit another of his long cigars. The big Fenian was a true Irishman—and as such, was particularly open to compliment. He recognized the justice of Corrigan's flattery, and

reaching forward his hand, he said, in milder tones—

"Well, well, shake hands. Ye hadn't the makin' av yerself, an' maybe appearances is agin ye."

Corrigan accepted the compliment, shook hands with his leader, and clutching the whiskey bottle, drowned all ill-feeling in a deep draught.

"I'd like to see ye act in an emergency," remarked Brophy, good-humouredly.

"Would ye, faith? thin Heaven sind me the opportunity, an' begorra I think I'll gratify ye."

"Well, look here, now! What would ye do av ye caught a spy at wan av yer matins?" said Brophy, categorically.

"What would I *do*—is it? Why, shoot him, av coorse," replied Corrigan, without moving a muscle of his face.

Now, The O'Banagher from his bed had been eagerly drinking in this conversation, and watching with great interest the movements of this pair of conspirators; but when he heard the last sanguinary declaration of the little villain in black, he suddenly removed his eye from the aperture in the screen, and, getting rapidly and silently out of bed, proceeded to creep underneath the couch so recently the scene of beatific visions. The couch upon which The O'Banagher had been reposing was a very narrow iron piece of furniture, which, by a simple but ingenious contrivance, was capable of being folded up, and in the day-time acted as an arm-chair that gave no hint whatever of its nocturnal uses. He had just inserted his head under the edge, and was endeavouring to get his shoulders in after it, when, exerting himself to this end with his leg, his right foot slipped suddenly and forcibly against one of the upright supporters of the clothes-horse, sending that piece of furniture, with all its weight of linen, to the ground. At the accompanying crash the two Fenians jumped instantly to their feet. Brophy, snatching the candle, rushed forward, with Corrigan at his heels. What the candle revealed to them were the body and legs of a little gentleman, whose head and shoulders were hidden under a very diminutive bedstead, and who was seemingly under the impression that he was keeping his presence a profound secret. He was not permitted to indulge the illusion for any length of time; for Brophy, who was a man of deeds



as well as of words, clutched The O'Banagher by the leg, and, by means of a rough jerk, dislodged him, setting him on his feet by means of another jerk, even more startling than the first. The O'Banagher, trembling in every limb, and feeling nervously for his eye-glass, looked the very picture of misery. He was about to shout "Murder and thieves!" but his captor, divining his intention, clapped his hand rudely on his mouth; while Corrigan, obtaining a piece of firewood, speedily shaped the block into a gag, which was forced between the gentleman's teeth. His own silk handkerchief, obtained from his own proper pocket, was tied over his mouth. Corrigan then searched about the bed for any property of the prisoner that might be conveniently restored to him. He was permitted to put on his boots and coat. His head-dress was not discoverable. Warning him, with an oath, to be very careful how he conducted himself, the captors lit a dark lantern, and led the unfortunate victim silently from the house. As they left the portal of Mrs. Connor's hospitable inn, the bleak morning air rushed about the bald and unprotected head of the prisoner, and he shivered pitably; but his new acquaintances had neither time nor inclination to study his minor grievances. Leading him for some distance up the Isnagarran-road, they turned suddenly into a dark boreen.

The O'Banagher, anticipating immediate execution, would have fallen to the ground, but was dragged along by his grim custodians. The three figures were immediately afterwards lost in the impenetrable gloom.



## THE ABDUCTION OF THE O'BANAGHER.

### CHAPTER IV.

WHEN it became noised abroad in Ballymarun that the illustrious representative of that borough had mysteriously and completely disappeared, the excitement was very great. There had been vague rumours of it the day after the hunt, but nothing definite was known, and nothing foul suspected. The departure of police and military was an occurrence so very usual that it excited no comment; and the men themselves, being pledged to silence, divulged nothing. But on the morning following, the rumours had been crystallized into distinct items of intelligence. The heart of the community was stirred to its core; the tongue of the community wagged incessantly. The day after the hunt had been a day of heavy rain.

The storm had now cleared off, and a bright blue sky had spread itself over sea and land. A great bank of cloud, more dazzling white than driven snow, lay on the horizon. It was strange to contrast the still, eternal languor of the sea, the silent motion of the sail boats and the herring smacks, and the noiseless progress of an Atlantic steamer descried in the extreme distance, with the babble and confusion going on in the town. Men had turned their eyes from the blue sea, with its white-crested waves—had ceased to sniff the refreshing odour that was blown in on their town. They had left their un-mended nets by the doors of the white cottages that overlook the sea. To-morrow would do to splice that oar splintered in last night's storm. The bottom of that boat could be tarred some other time. Women, too, had crossed the well-scrubbed thresholds, leaving their kitchens tenantless save of a toddler or so of three years' experience of this naughty world, or a domestic pig that, unforbidden, inserted his snout into the three-legged pot, devouring a meal destined for nicer stomachs. If you wanted to find the inhabitants of Ballymarun that morning, you would have to go to the market-place, where, in excited groups, they stood before the town hall; or to the High-street, where, in still larger numbers, they crowded round the windows of the *Bally-*

*marun Eagle* office, and round the door of Mr. Murphy's mansion.

The crowds round the town hall were engaged in discussing a formidable-looking placard which had been pasted over-night on the lintels and doorposts. It had been composed by the editor of the *Eagle*, and read as follows:—

**"FOUL PLAY !**

"Whereas, The O'Banagher is missing; and whereas he was last heard of at Mrs. Connor's hotel, on the Isnagarran-road; and whereas Foul Play is suspected. The inhabitants of this town and its vicinage are hereby earnestly requested to render every assistance in their power to those engaged in efforts to trace The O'Banagher, and to secure his captors. A full and interesting account of the circumstances, so far as they are known, attending the disappearance of our respected member is contained in this morning's edition of the *Eagle*. To be obtained at the office, High-street, and from all respectable booksellers.

**"PRICE ONE PENNY."**

Here, indeed, was a horrible mystery; not lessened by the imaginations of the crowd that gesticulated, and turned up its eyes, and shook its head, and marvelled greatly. All sorts of conflicting rumours were afloat, some of them amazingly ingenious, but most of them hopelessly absurd. Every now and then one or two from the crowd would race off to the High-street, and join the larger assemblage that was gathered in front of the *Eagle* office. An advertisement, written on blank sheets, appeared in the window, and catching the eye and exciting the curiosity of the mob, occasionally drew an unwary purchaser to the little counter within. The advertisement ran thus:—

**"ABDUCTION OF THE O'BANAGHER.**

**DOUBTS AND FEARS.**

**IMPORTANT CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE.  
DEPARTURE OF THE ROYAL IRISH CON-  
STABULARY.**

**DEPARTURE OF THE 9TH FOOT.  
BRIEF MEMOIR OF THE O'BANAGHER.**

**ONE PENNY!!"**

They order things better in Fleet-street; but for one who united in his own person the offices of literary editor and commercial manager, the attempt was by no means a

bad one. It had a marked effect on the crowd, although not so great an effect as it would have had were purchasers not surrounded on their emergence from the office, and besought by the illiterate to read out the intelligence, a request with which the purchaser usually complied—reciting in the hearing of all. By this means, all the important paragraphs became the property of non-purchasers as well as of those who had the moral courage to invest their hard-earned pennies—a result which the editor deplored, but was unable to prevent. And indeed the *Eagle* was well worth a penny that morning. It contained a lengthened and glowing description of The O'Banagher's conduct at the wedding party; his gay condescension at the ball; his characteristic generosity to the bride. Then followed a minute description of the preparations made for his repose, a description of the bed, with an exact enumeration of the bed-clothes; a notification of the hour at which his amiable hostess took leave of him, and a verbatim report of their last interview. Then all became mystery and surmise. His hunting cap and silver-mounted riding-whip had been discovered in the morning. And there had also been discovered some whiskey in a bottle of foreign shape, a broken pipe, the stump of a cigar, and a scrap of a French newspaper.

"It is clear from this evidence," said the *Eagle*, "that some party or parties unknown entered the kitchen after the respected gentleman had retired to seek upon the extemporised couch that repose which his recent exertions in the hunting field had rendered specially desirable. We are informed, on indubitable testimony, that at all times The O'Banagher is a particularly heavy sleeper. Fatigue and excitement would, upon this occasion, have rendered the arrests of sleep more potent than usual. While in this state of unconsciousness, the villain or villains made his or their attack; and, for aught we know to the contrary," continued the writer, "the unfortunate and beloved gentleman may be immured in the romantic but inaccessible solitudes of a smugglers' cave; or upon some lonely heath his mangled corpse may be stretched, the manly heart at rest for ever—the innocent blood calling upon high Heaven for vengeance."

Thus ably and eloquently did the editor cater for his constituents. A notice in the advertising columns promised a second edi-

tion in case any event of importance transpired before three o'clock in the afternoon.

While the crowd was standing, with that morbid curiosity which impels people to cluster about a horror long after they have gleaned the least important detail connected with it, and gazing at the big posters, two horsemen drew up at the door of the office. The crowd at once recognized the well-known features of Larry, The O'Banagher's body-servant. The other servant was Mike, The O'Banagher's groom. If anything short of the appearance of The O'Banagher's mangled corpse could have increased the popular excitement, it was such an arrival as this. The crowd pressed eagerly round the obliging Larry, and asked a hundred questions all in a breath. But Larry, with a stern and melancholy countenance, requested them to "be aisy." He then jumped from his horse, threw the reins to the groom, and rushing unceremoniously into the editor's private room, requested that gentleman to give him all the latest particulars that had reached him. The editor, who knew nothing except what had already appeared, indulged in an eloquent recital of his various articles on the question; and Larry, in exchange for his politeness, informed him that he was about to look for his master himself—as he couldn't bear the "suspinsie" any longer, and he didn't "b'lieve the sojers and peelers was worth a snuff." Larry emerged, mounted his horse, and rode off with a very grave expression on his proverbially merry face. The crowd gazed after the departing horses, and then turned to wait patiently for the next excitement.

Larry didn't let the grass grow under his horse's feet; and Mike kept up with Larry.

When they arrived at Mrs. Connor's shebeen, they found two of the constables of the detachment in the kitchen, smoking. Their comrades had taken the road to the right of the house, intending to explore the neighbourhood thoroughly. The military had not arrived, and were supposed to have taken the wrong road. Larry, having explained who he was, and the nature of his mission, obtained stabling for the two horses; and returning to the kitchen, round which he gazed tearfully, proceeded to ask a few questions. He elicited among other facts that The O'Banagher's riding-whip had been discovered, not in the kitchen, as the *Eagle*

had falsely asserted, but on the road to the left of the house; from which he argued, naturally enough, that the master had taken that road in disappearing. Larry therefore determined to take the road to the left, and then—trust to providence.

Before leaving the kitchen, he drew from his breast-pocket two small pistols, which he carefully loaded; and giving one of them to Mike, he nodded to the surprised and sleepy policemen and departed. They had not proceeded a great distance down the Isnagarran-road, when they came to the identical boreen down which we beheld The O'Banagher vanishing. Had it been an ordinary boreen, it would not have attracted Larry's attention; but it was *not* an ordinary boreen. Larry had never seen such a dismal, dark, lonely boreen in all his life before. Larry stopped to have a good look at it. A high, dank ditch, covered with nettles and dock leaves, ran down each side. Rough brushwood was growing over the confined roadway. Behind the ditch on either side grew a row of great elm trees, which, mingling their branches overhead, excluded the direct rays of the sun. There was that deserted, forlorn air about the place that sometimes grows round a scene where ghosts are supposed to walk, or where a horrible thing has happened. It looked so dark and forbidding, and altogether undesirable, that were it not for the deep ruts, now full of water from last night's rain, you might have thought it one of those undiscovered waste places—

"—where no one comes,  
Or hath come since the making of the world."

Larry stood looking down the damp and leafy avenue. He was irresolute and puzzled, but evidently reasoning with himself. At last he said to his companion—

"They wouldn't go far down the main road—would they, Mike?"

"Arrah, how the divil can I tell?" said Mike, who was one of those who never argued on probabilities—and never acted on them either.

"An' they'd go to a lonely place av they meant mischief—wouldn't they?" said Larry, more to himself than to Mike.

"Troth, it's meself doesn't know what the blackguards 'ud do."

"They might have taken this boreen, be jabers."

"Well, I dar say they might, now," said the groom, who was determined not to com-

mit himself, and who evidently didn't at all like the appearance of the shady thoroughfare, concerning an entry into which Larry's mind was now being exercised.

"It's as dark as the devil! Faith, we'll take it. Look t' yer pistol, and come along."

So saying, Larry walked boldly into the lane, followed by his aide-de-camp.

The boreen ran between two fields, and had fallen into disuse owing to the opening of a more commodious lane a little higher up the road. Larry and Mike were soon up to the eyes in mud, but struggled on manfully, stumbling now over a stone hidden in the rank creepers, and now slipping into a hole some feet in depth. They peered into every bush that they passed, and now and then scrambled to the top of the ditch to obtain a glimpse of the surrounding scenery. But they saw nothing. Even the birds and four-footed creatures seemed to have deserted the dismal spot. The monotonous croak of a frog from the side of a slimy pool, the frightened chirp-chirp of a nervous sparrow, were all the signs of life that saluted the ears of the wanderers. It's a long boreen that hath no turning. That which Larry was now stumbling through had several. They had proceeded with infinite caution about half a mile when they came to the first of them; and the moment they achieved the angle, and entered upon a new vista, they saw before them, and coming in their direction, a little man dressed in seedy black. The little man was stepping gingerly to avoid the green puddles; but the moment his eye detected Larry approaching, pistol in hand, he suddenly turned tail and fled, hoping probably that he was unobserved. If he cherished any such hope he speedily found it delusive, for Larry, shouting out at the top of his voice, "Holy Vargin! it's Johnny Corrigan! Howld! Stop! Howld hard, ye devil—whoop!" dashed off wildly in pursuit—the groom keeping well up with his rapid strides.

The little man only increased his pace as the exultant shriek of Larry rang in his ears. The little man ran excellently, and terror seemed to give him wings; but Larry, who was fresher and stronger, gained upon him gradually but perceptibly. It was an exciting chase. A stumble of Larry's, and the consequent halt of Mike to pick him up, gave the fugitive a momentary advantage. It was soon lost, however, and the distance

between pursuer and pursued was diminished to a few yards. Mike stopped, stooped, lifted a stone, ran on again, stopped once more, and then threw the missile with considerable force. It was well aimed. It hit the little man in the back of the neck. The stricken hero stopped for an instant, made a spasmodic effort to continue the race, but failed in the intention, and staggering forward, would have fallen to the ground, but that Larry, at that moment coming up to him, grasped him suddenly by one of the coat-tails. Larry, however, in catching the coat-tail, also caught some metallic substance therein concealed, which, penetrating the cloth and inserting itself into Larry's palm, caused him a sudden pang of pain. Releasing his hold on the broadcloth with one hand, he administered to the little man a severe blow on the back with the other, which sent him sprawling on face and hands in the soft, adhesive mud. Prompted by a curiosity which mastered for the moment all other feelings, Larry thrust his hand into the back pocket of the overtaken and overthrown fugitive, in order to discover the instrument of torture hidden in its dark recesses, and pulled out one of The O'Banagher's spurs! He gave a yell of surprise and exultation, which the groom failed instantly to understand; and then, catching the fallen wretch by the waistband of the breeches, he set him on his feet effectually, but roughly. The man looked a most miserable object, with the brown mud and green moisture clinging to all parts of his body. At the same time he assumed an air of offended dignity, which was in itself sufficiently amusing.



THE ABDUCTION OF THE  
O'BANAGHER.

## CHAPTER V.

"SO it's yerself that's in it, Johnny Corrigan, is it?" inquired Larry, laughing, in spite of his desire to conduct an important inquiry with due solemnity.

"Yes, it *is* meself, an' I tell ye ye'll rue this day's work bitterly. What d' ye mane by it—at all?" gasped out Corrigan, panting hard.

"Is it what do I mane by it ye want to know? Well, I mane where's The O'Banagher, ye murderin' varmint?" said Larry, giving him a violent shake just to stimulate his memory.

"I know nothing about The O'Banagher, but I know you, Larry; an' mark my words, ye'll repent this outrage."

"Oh! so I'll repent it, will I, Misther Corrigan—raycently a bum-bailiff—then a dishonest agint—and now a murderin' vagabond. So this is yer gratitude to a masther that might have thransported ye when he only dismissed ye! Where's the masther, ye pettifoggin' six an' eightpence, ye?"

"I tell ye I don't know," said the other, sulkily, and trying to release his arm from the tightening grip of Mike, who had secured him on one side.

"Arrah! sweet bad luck t' ye, Misther Corrigan; an' p'raps ye don't know this spur ayther?"

And Larry dangled the spur before the astonished man's gaze. The wretched creature dropped his eyes as they encountered the implement; but he maintained silence.

"Now, Mike," said Larry, addressing his assistant, "get a tight hould av him."

Mike, obeying the direction of his chief, pinioned the captive by both arms; and Larry, walking in front of him, cocked his pistol and presented it, holding it in dangerous proximity to the victim's head.

"Now, Johnny Corrigan, tell me this minit where ye've hid the masther, or be me sowl I'll shoot ye down like a dog."

"I tell ye, Larry, I don't know. Arrah! why should I know more nor another?"

"You don't know! Well, I'm sorry for ye, that's all. It 'ud be something to die in definse av a saycret; but it's a poor thing intirely to be shot in a boreen just for bein' a blackguard, an' that's what I'll shoot *you* for. Stand clear, Mike!"

Saying which, Larry stepped back a pace or two to take aim. There was a determined air about his executioner that fairly overcame Corrigan. He shouted out in agony—

"Don't shoot me, Larry, for the love of God! Sure is it afther murderin' a fellow-crayther ye'd be? Don't shoot me, an' I'll tell ye all about it, avick!"

Mike resumed his vice-like hold, and Larry simply remarked—

"Well, take us to him, thin!"

He then took his unengaged arm, and so they marched him up the lane between them. There was silence for some moments—broken by Corrigan, who, in snivelling accents, said—

"Mind, Larry, it's not meself is in this business at all. I know where they've hid him, an' I'll show ye the place, too, av ye'll let me off. Promise ye'll let me off, Larry darlin'."

"I'll promise ye nothin', ye black-hearted scoundhrel, exceptin' this, av ye come wid us an find the masther, I'll make ye a prisint av yer dhirty life—an' it's meself wouldn't take a prisint av it; an' av ye desave us, I'll blow yer brains out."

Corrigan lifted his eyes in a devout manner—

"Well, Heaven above be me witness," he said, "I've nothin' at all at all to do wid this business, only it's bad hands I've fallen into intirely. Sure, I'd rather have me hand cut off than hurt a hair of The O'Banagher's head—God bless him!"

"Howld yer whist and lade the way," re-



plied Larry, pricking him in the shin with the spur. The three then marched in dead silence through the deserted lane. They had not proceeded very far before they caught sight of the thatch of a mud hovel peering over the ditch. A little farther on was a wooden gate much fallen to decay, with the useless rusty padlock hanging hopelessly on one of its bars.

"That's it," said Corrigan, nodding towards the gate. So they went through it, and approached the hovel.

It was a damp, untenanted hut, built of stones and mud, one of its walls being to all appearance formed of the ditch itself. A few melancholy trophies of a life that had once been lived in it lay in front. The fetid pool in which the ducks had been wont to disport themselves, an old iron pot considerably the worse for wear and exposure to the weather, the remnants of a barrow, a broom handle divorced from its better half—all these things, rotten or rotting, told how long ago the dwelling place had been condemned as uninhabitable. Larry stopped not to investigate these relics; but, dragging the unwilling guide after him, pushed open the door of the hovel, and all three crossed the threshold together.

"Knock him down an' sit on him," said Larry, sententiously, to Mike.

Mike knocked Corrigan down on his face, and sat on his prostrate form, as desired.

Larry looked round the miserable and ill-lighted apartment, and soon descried, seated in its remotest corner, The O'Banagher.

He sat so motionless and so silent, that at first Larry feared that he was gazing upon that mangled corpse for the appearance of which the *Eagle* had in some measure prepared him. On approaching more nearly, however, he discovered that The O'Banagher was indeed alive, but pinioned and gagged, so as to render speech and motion impossible.

"Och, masther darlin', is it murdered ye are? Sure, it's meself knew I'd find ye av ye were above ground at all. Spake to me, masther dear—spake to me!"

And the affectionate creature, almost crying with joy, proceeded to remove the gag and to undo the cruel knots of the rope. The O'Banagher, who had been ruefully anticipating a lingering death by starvation, gave way to one of those impulses of nature with which monarch and subject are alike

occasionally afflicted, threw himself upon Larry's neck—Larry stooping in order that the ceremony might be effectively performed—and called him his brave deliverer, his guardian angel, &c., &c. Pity 'tis that the vulgar appetites of the body should so often set aside the delicious sentiments of the soul.

Having expressed his gratitude in words almost poetical, The O'Banagher looked at his servant, and remarked with peculiar pathos—

"Larry, I'm as hungry as the deuce. I haven't tasted food since this time yesterday."

"Och, musha, d'ye hear that, now?" said Larry, giving a vicious kick to the recumbent body of Corrigan. "An' meself niver brought bit or sup wid me. We'd better get back at wanst to Mrs. Connor's. We can tie this scoundhrel up an' take him along wid us."

"Can't you shoot him here?" suggested the member for Ballymarun.

"Faith, I wouldn't be afther robbin' the hangman, sor!" said Larry.

Corrigan was assisted to his legs, considerably crushed by the incubus of Mike's body—for Mike was the broth of a boy, and no light weight, you see. The little rebel was bathed in tears, and called Heaven, earth, and The O'Banagher to witness that it was none of his doing—that he was the helpless implement in the hands of a ferocious monster—that— But Larry cut short his lamentations by presenting his pistol, and solemnly declaring that, if he indulged in so much as another syllable, he would thereupon send his soul into the other world. They then secured his arms to his sides, and corded him carefully.

When he had been tied, Larry caught hold of one end of the rope and Mike of the other. So they dragged him from the hovel and regained the lane. The O'Banagher brought up the rear with the pistols, one in each hand—cocked and presented at the catiff's head, in readiness to punish with instant death any ill-considered attempt to escape in that direction.

And that is the history of the abduction and recovery of The O'Banagher. What remains to be told may be done in a few words.

I happened to be in the town of Bally-

marun when The O'Banagher made his triumphal entry. It was an exciting and imposing spectacle. The streets were thronged with a rejoicing populace. Murphy stood in the first floor window of the *Eagle* office, delivering fervid orations. Beneath him fluttered an enormous placard, announcing a third edition of the local organ, containing an account of "The Romantic Discovery of The O'Banagher by his own Body Servant. Price One Penny."

At last, the procession from Isnagarran entered the town. First came the military; behind the military, The O'Banagher, mounted on Fin MacCool; following the chief came Mike and Larry; behind them the constabulary, with Corrigan, bound and broken-hearted, in their midst. Their progress through the enthusiastic crowd was naturally slow; tumultuous cheer upon tumultuous cheer rang through the air as the chieftain entered the town. He lifted his hunting-cap; his gay uniform, a little muddy and crumpled, dazzled the eyes of the beholders. He placed his glass in his eye, and smiled sweetly, bowing to the men, and gallantly kissing his hand to the women. I followed with the mob through the town and out of it—followed with the mob till the procession arrived at Castle Banagher—when I saw the monarch enter his gates, on the supporters of which were emblazoned the family arms—two Irish bulls rampant. Back to the town again, where flags fluttered, and tar barrels blazed, and everybody was in a transport of delight, and a condition of demoralization hitherto unknown in the respectable village.

Months and months afterwards, revisiting the scene, I was informed of one or two facts which I must append as a sequel. Corrigan was transported; Brophy was never captured; The O'Banagher married Miss Mulligan. Owing to vexatious political complications which it was out of the little monarch's power to prevent, he was obliged to vacate the seat, which is now held by Desmond O'Brallagan, the notorious Home Ruler. I am informed that Castle Banagher has been sold by public auction, and that its late proprietor lives quietly enough with his wife in Merrion-square, Dublin. Gossips further allege that it is probable that he will be the last of his Royal House.

THE END.